

PRESS RELEASE

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Energy Transition in Industry: German Federal President Steinmeier and BMW Foundation at the “Werkstatt des Wandels”

On 5 September 2024, the latest part of the event series “Werkstatt des Wandels” (Workshop of Change) took place in Lower Saxony, organized by the German Federal President's Office, the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt, the Center for Responsible Research and Innovation at Fraunhofer IAO, and the Carl Zeiss Foundation.

With the guiding theme “Energy Transition in Industrial Production,” Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier engaged with representatives from business, policy, civil society, and start-ups on the future of energy supply and the industrial use of renewable energy. The event highlighted how crucial the energy transition is for industrial restructuring and the economic success of Germany.

Energy Transition in Industry

The energy transition has long been a central topic in social and political discourse, and it was examined in depth during this event. For industry, the balance between energy consumption and energy availability is of vital importance, as it significantly affects competitiveness and future viability. “We must not tire in pushing the transformation of the energy landscape forward.” emphasized President Steinmeier.

A clear example of a successful transformation was provided during a visit to Siemens Gamesa in Cuxhaven, which manufactures wind turbines for offshore installations. Additionally, the chemical company Dow Germany in Stade presented its modernization of energy-intensive production processes.

Workshop Discussions: Focus on Collaboration

Dow also hosted the fourth edition of the "Workshop Discussions," held as part of this event series. This time, the conversations centered on decarbonizing energy-intensive industries, focusing on how different actors—from companies to academia to local communities—can contribute to the energy transition.

Participants included Heba Aguib, Member of the Board at BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt, Lower Saxony's Prime Minister Stephan Weil, Kathrin Ballerstein from the grid operator TenneT TSO GmbH, Detlef Schulz from Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg, and Matthias Otte from the Federal Network Agency. Eliza Diekmann-Cloppenburg, mayor of Coesfeld who also participated, emphasized the importance of involving citizens for a successful transformation. In Coesfeld, a citizen participation model ensures that both the city and its residents benefit from the expansion of renewable energy.

Heba Aguib underscored the importance of cross-sector collaboration: "To achieve climate neutrality by 2050, we must equally consider societal, political, and economic dynamics. Expanding renewable energy is crucial to reaching net-zero by 2050. All innovation and economic action are of no consequence if civil society does not support these changes—not only must the speed of transformation change, but so must its perception by the general public."

Start-ups as Drivers of the Energy Transition

In addition to established companies and political decision-makers, start-ups also presented innovative solutions for the energy transition. Martin Schichtel from Kraftblock, a start-up based in Saarland, introduced an innovative high-temperature storage system that enables the industry to use green process heat, contributing to decarbonization. Wei Wu from Heatrix, a Bremen-based start-up, demonstrated how fossil fuels in industry can be replaced by electricity that is converted into CO₂-neutral high-temperature process heat.

Innovation and start-ups play a central role in societal transformation processes. To further support this development, the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt helps young companies scale their sustainable solutions through its RESPOND Accelerator program. Kraftblock was part of the first cohort of this program in 2020. Furthermore, the BMW Foundation is a core partner of the Energy Resilience Leadership Group (ERLG), an initiative by Breakthrough Energy and Siemens Energy aimed at reducing Europe's energy dependency through cleantech projects.

Innovation Culture as the Foundation for Change

On the eve of the "Workshop of Change," the BMW Foundation organized an event on "Renewable Energy Systems of the Future." Participants included Martin Mann from the Federal President's Office and Martina Schraudner from Fraunhofer IAO (CeRRI). In her welcome speech, Heba Aguib emphasized: "The energy transition is a central concern for us, which we are pushing forward together with our partners. As a network foundation, we create spaces for dialogue and collaboration between diverse stakeholders and initiatives like the ERLG, show how barriers can be broken down and innovations advanced. With a culture of innovation, we not only strengthen the resilience of our society but also the cornerstones of our democracy."

The "Werkstatt des Wandels" Event Series

Transformation processes, structural changes, and their impact on society and the economy are the core focus of the "Werkstatt des Wandels" and its accompanying workshop discussions. The events cover various sectors of society, such as healthcare and agriculture, which were addressed in previous sessions.

About the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt

The BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt unites the brightest minds from business, policy, science, and civil society to collaborate on forward-looking approaches and solutions to the challenges of our time. Together, we work across borders, cultures, and systems for innovative pathways to strengthen an innovative and responsible economy while also promoting an open-minded and future-proof society.

As a European foundation with a global focus, the BMW Foundation operates from its locations in Berlin and Munich.

For more information on the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt, visit <https://bmw-foundation.org/>.